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## Valley Life

### sights

A cel featuring Looney Tunes characters in a cancan is among the works of Friz Freleng on display at the center.



By Vito D'Amico / Los Angeles Times

## A Creator of Cartoons

Skirball Cultural Center hosts show on animator Friz Freleng.

By JOSEF WOODARD  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

When considering the legendary cartoon characters of our day, it takes a mind shift to accept the human hands at work behind the mythology.

Somewhere, the work occupied by Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig and Sylvester has a vivid reality all its own. We don't tend to think about the creative process of a salaried, flesh-and-blood artist sitting down at a drawing board in the San Fernando Valley, bringing the critics' antics to life.

In that respect, the show of Friz Freleng's works, personal artifacts and other bits—a brace now at the Skirball Cultural Center can be a pleasantly jolting experience.

Included in the show are cels of cherished characters, story layouts, backgrounds and statuettes of characters such as the Pink Panther.

But we also find evidence of Freleng's personal life, including customized greeting cards for his relatives.

Black-and-white photos depict him literally at his drawing board, and a copy of his employment record shows he made \$275 a week at Warner Bros. in 1933, and

\$235 a week in 1941.

A display case holds an Oscar, an Emmy and a medal from Cannes on the occasion of Bugs Bunny's 50th anniversary. Freleng, born in Kansas City, Mo., in 1905 as Isadore Freleng, was one of the hardest-working men in the business, from its earliest days.

He started work for Walt Disney in 1927 but moved to Warner Bros. in 1930 and was a faithful employee there for 33 years during the Looney Tunes glory days. He formed his own company, DePatie-Freleng, in the 1960s and created the Pink Panther cartoons, among others. We also get hints in the show of Freleng's own philosophical attitudes.

Private Snafu was a character he developed during WWII, appearing in the Army-Navy Screen Magazine to lighten the task of military training. In a surprisingly hawkish drawing 50 years later, Yosemite Sam appears as a Desert Storm Trooper, spitting a xenophobic line: "I'm a-joinin' them storm troopers 'cause they don't take no guff from no flea-bitten critter varmint."

Violence, of course, is threaded throughout the Looney Tunes world, but tempered with humor

and resiliency.

It takes only seconds to recover from a gunshot wound or an explosive blast. A careful, religious act was going on, in which the energy and violence of the character—the basis of many cartoons—was countered by wisecracks and pratfalls and the cartoonist's own taste.

In one sketch for a hunting scene ("Be vewy, vewy quiet, I'm hunting wabbit"), a note in blue pencil reads "guns are too realistic."

In a limited-edition cel from 1980, five years before Freleng's death, we see a choral line of the Looney Tunes crew, shaking their various legs in a cancan, like aging vaudeville stars gathered one last time for a reunion. But, of course, the difference is that age is a rubbery, changeable thing when you're a cartoon. Freleng has moved on, but Porky Pig is, in his own way, immortal.

BE THERE

"That's Not All Folks," the Art of Friz Freleng, through Sunday at the Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 Sepulveda Blvd. in Los Angeles. Gallery hours Tuesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; (310) 440-6500.

### page turner

Author Chris Morris will sign his book "Locustland," a noir-suspense thriller, at 7:30 Saturday at Barnes & Noble, 3301 Tampa Ave., Northridge. The weekend's music menu offers **Aleka Donsky** performing pop standards of the 1930s, '40s and '50s at 8 tonight, and **Amy Wilson and Ben Balaban** playing tunes from their CD "Love Pearl" at 9 p.m. Saturday. (818) 886-5443.

**Exile Books and Music**, 14025 Magnolia Blvd., Sherman Oaks, will host a CD release party for singer-songwriter **Mark Humphrey** at 4 p.m. Saturday. "Song at the Moon" is Humphrey's fourth CD. No cover. Singer-songwriter **Sandy Ross** will perform at 8:30 p.m. \$5 cover. Also, **Annette Frank**

and **Richard Modiano** will host **Poetry in Exile** on Wednesday night at 8. Featured poets on this St. Patrick's Day evening will be **E.C. O'Archibque** and **Peter O'Mark**. Open reading signs up start at 7:30 p.m. (818) 986-6409.

Author **Michiko Rokkai** will sign and discuss her book, "Mental Fitness" at 1 p.m. Saturday at **Barnes & Noble**, 8800 Tampa Ave., Northridge. Rokkai is the great-granddaughter of Sakei-an Saeki, one of the first Zen masters to make a home in America. "Mental Fitness" takes a holistic approach to well-being, integrating mind, body and spirit. (818) 773-0621.

**North Hollywood Regional Branch Library** will present "Double Duty: The Working Women

of America" at 2 p.m. Sunday. Created and performed by **Dorene Ludwig**, this performance piece is a celebration of working women, family women and activist women. It is part of the "Sunday at the Library" cultural program. Free. (818) 766-7185.

Author and psychologist **Jeffrey Sheppard** will discuss his book "You and the Year 2000" at 8:30 p.m. Thursday at **Barnes & Noble**, 16461 Ventura Blvd., Encino. Sheppard, a specialist in stress-related problems, will talk about Y2K problems faced by government and private industry and offer tips for reducing personal year 2000 stress. (818) 380-1636.

—JAMES E. FOWLER

### SPOTLIGHT

Continued from B1  
to Damascus became a man with a mission.

"Four years ago," Schwartzbart explains, "because of my concern for the religious right, I caught fire. I established the San Fernando Valley Chapter of Americans United and now it's the largest chapter in the country."

The local chapter, which recruits as far north as Santa Barbara, has 500 to 1,000 members. And, Schwartzbart says, with obvious pride, "Our mailing list is now pushing 2,200."

A semiretired metallurgical engineer who continues to consult, Schwartzbart works tirelessly for Americans United.

He is ready to speak to any group, any time, and does so 30 or 40 times a year.

Schwartzbart's "active clergy outreach program" is as important part of the organization's strategy. It reminds people that those on the religious right don't speak for everyone, not even all Christians, he says.

And it allows the organization to tap into a pool of leaders with considerable clout. From the start, Schwartzbart explains, "I decided I would court constituency leaders." The reason

was simple. "If I could convert someone to my cause, they would carry their constituents with them."

"Who are the most natural constituency leaders in the country?" he asks. Clergy, he answers. "They have a captive audience every weekend."

The chapter regularly meets in churches and synagogues and often has clergy as speakers on its program. A Catholic priest argued in favor of continued separation of church and state at last month's meeting.

Clergy from some religions and denominations have been much more responsive than others, Schwartzbart acknowledges.

Although he is reluctant to single out individual denominations, he says liberal Protestant groups have been among the most supportive.

He hasn't made much headway with Islamic leaders (although the group has had Islamic speakers) or among Orthodox Jews.

One reason Schwartzbart has found allies among the clergy may be because they understand his goal in supporting a cause he believes in.

"I tell all my clergy friends I'm proselytizing just as hard as they are," Schwartzbart also seeks supporters among the young and

groups he describes as natural constituencies for Americans United, such as gays and lesbians, and others who have felt the sting of the religious right.

"We're engaged in a worldwide struggle of moderation against fundamentalism," says Schwartzbart.

Thoughtful analysis is one of the weapons he tries to muster in his ongoing campaign "to shine a light on extremism."

"We always have substantive speakers who have more to say than, 'Kick Pat Robertson. He's no good.'"

Schwartzbart believes all minorities are threatened when religion is allowed to play a part in public life.

"Either you have a theocracy or you have religious liberty. They are absolutely incompatible."

He remembers a painful example from his own life. When he was growing up in Altoona, Pa., he had to say the Lord's Prayer every morning in school.

"There I was, a 5-year-old Jewish boy, starting the day with a prayer to Jesus Christ. In Schwartzbart's view, those who value their liberties can't afford to become complacent. "We can't get comfortable, ever," he says. "Once again, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance."

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